

Fordham Manor Reformed Church,
New York City.
Bronx Co.

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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

District No. 4
Southern New York State

Historic American Buildings Survey
Wm. Dewey Foster, District Officer,
25 West 45th Street, New York City.

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FORDHAM MANOR REFORMED CHURCH
Kingsbridge Road, Borough of The Bronx, N. Y. C.

Historical Introduction

This edifice is the third in succession which its congregation has occupied in the same neighborhood. The western part of the Borough of The Bronx was included in Westchester County until 1874, and the eastern part until 1895.

Jenkins, The Story of the Borough of The Bronx,
1912, pp. 1, 7, 8.

We therefore look to Bolton's Hist. of Westchester County for the historical sources relating to the beginnings of the Reformed Dutch Church in the ancient Manor of Fordham.

The Manor grant was given to Jan Arcer (John Archer) by Governor Lovelace under date of November 15, 1671. Fordham Manor was bounded on the west by the Harlem River, on the east by the Bronx River, on the north by a line running nearly due east from Spuyten Duyvil, and on the south by a line running nearly due east from the present High Bridge.

It was settled by the Dutch from Harlem, who came across the Harlem River from Manhattan Island. They brought the religion of the Established Reformed Church. As soon as the Dutch recaptured New York in 1673, the inhabitants of Fordham Village petitioned Governor Colve that village magistrates be selected by him of the Reformed Christian religion only and of the Dutch nation.

After Archer's death, Cornelis Steenwyck acquired the Manor as mortgagee. He and his wife left it to the "Nether Reformed Dutch Congregation within the city of New York" by will dated November 20, 1684. Steenwyck was the third mayor of New York, being elected first in 1668, and in 1670, 1682 and 1683. Conflicting claims reduced the extent of

Fordham Manor Reformed Church

the property acquired from the Steenwycks by the Dutch Congregation of New York City, which had been established as early as 1628 in the fort at New Amsterdam (the name New York bore when under Dutch rule). Its successor is the present Collegiate Reformed Church of New York.

The Collegiate Church organized a society on its property at Fordham in May, 1896. The Rev. John Montaigne was installed as pastor, and services were first held as usual in private homes.

The first church was built in 1706 through the liberality of Margaretta Steenwyck (widow of Cornelis Steenwyck), William Dyckman and others. The building stood on the farm of James Valentine, later the property of Moses Devoe, at what is now Fordham Road and Sedgwick Avenue. The names of those land-owners are perpetuated in the names of a street and a park respectively. At the southeast corner of the crossing of these two roads formerly stood the ancient Dutch burying-ground, and the church stood on the north side of Fordham Road on the land now occupied by Webb's Shipbuilding Academy and home. In spite of the usual difficulties in supporting a minister in the early days, the building remained in use until the Revolution. Dominie Joann P. Tetard, their pastor, joined Montgomery in the Canada expedition as chaplain early in the struggle.

During the war, the church edifice suffered the usual disaster; being close to the camp of the Hessian commander Americh and his chassours, it probably served as a hospital or stable as other churches did.

At a classis of the Reformed Church held in Flatbush on Sept. 2, 1800, it was resolved to give encouragement to the congregation while a prospect appeared that the "refused" church at Fordham would be restored, and the eminent Rev. John Henry Livingston was sent to visit them.

The next year a new church was built, not on the site where the

Fordham Manor Reformed Church

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3. BRONX

first had stood for 95 years, but on land deeded as a gift for the purpose by Dennis Valentine, Sr., near the site of the present church on Kingsbridge Road, which, in the modern plan of the City, is two long blocks north of the old site.

The Rev. Dr. Livingston reported in 1802 that he had reorganized the church according to his appointment, and the Rev. John Jackson was installed as pastor. Eleven pastors have served the congregation since 1835 when his term of service ended.

The Present Edifice: Date, Location and Description

In 1848 the present edifice was erected immediately adjoining the site of the second, on land given by Valentine's son. It stands on the north side of Kingsbridge Road about opposite the head of Grand Avenue and near the first Croton Aqueduct.

In 1878, Horace B. Claflin, Esq., whose suburban residence and large private grounds remained almost unchanged until recent years just north of the church, gave funds for the enlargement of the edifice.

The church records, unfortunately, were destroyed by fire several years prior to the publication of Jenkins' Story of the Bronx in 1912 (q.v., p.278).

The following descriptive field-notes were prepared by Mr. Alfred C. Palmas, Architect, of New York, during the present survey:

"The original building, in general design and detail quite characteristic of the decline of the Greek revival in the mid-nineteenth century, is a simple brick structure with wood portico, entablature, and cupola. The two large ball finials at each side of the pediment which are out of character with the rest of the facade were added in the Eighties. The weather-vane, which was removed in recent years after the supporting rod

Fordham Manor Reformed Church

had been bent by a wind storm, is at present kept on the second platform of the cupola.

"The bell, mounted on the first platform of the cupola, was formerly operated by means of a rope over a wheel. This wheel is 69 inches in diameter, beautifully fashioned of oak and fastened together with wood pins, a fine example of the old wheelwright's craft. The bell is inscribed: 'From Meneely's Foundry West Troy N.Y. 1849'.

"A gallery, now removed, originally extended across the south end of the auditorium. In the gallery stairway now used only for access to the cupola, may still be seen a fragment of the original wall decoration consisting of panel mouldings painted on the plaster.

"The stained glass in the windows reflects the contemporary vogue for the Gothic revival."

Written, May 4, 1934, by

Thomas W. Hotchkiss

Thomas W. Hotchkiss
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Approved: *Wm. Dwyer Foster*

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Reviewed 1936 by H.C.F.